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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [KISL](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: ISLAMIST FIGURE SPARKS DEBATE OVER ENGAGING THE
U.S.

REF: AMMAN 0197

Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) Public debate has arisen in Jordan over the late February visit to the United States of the deputy Secretary General of the Islamic Action Front (IAF), which is the political wing of Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood. IAF figure Ruheil Gharaibeh traveled to Washington to take part in a February 26 seminar, "Strategies for Engaging Political Islam," organized by the Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED). During the seminar, Gharaibeh reportedly called for the United States to: stop supporting "despotic regimes;" grant money and financial assistance with conditions to ensure tangible change; adopt an "even-handed" policy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and combat racism and extremism by studying its causes.

¶2. (U) Gharaibeh's travel to the States and his comments sparked an ongoing debate in the Jordanian press about Islamists' relationship with the USG. The main Government newspaper, Al-Rai, criticized Gharaibeh for apparently promising not to meet with official Americans while in the States but then proposing to members of "U.S. national institutions" the need to establish a broad national front to transform Jordan. (Note: Gharaibeh met with Congressional staffers and spoke on a panel moderated by Nathan Brown, Director of the Institute of Middle East Studies at George Washington University. Also on the panel were Shadi Hamid, Director of Research at POMED; Mona Yacoubian of the U.S. Institute of Peace; and Zoe Nautre, Visiting Fellow at the German Council on Foreign Relations. End note.)

¶3. (U) Independent opposition daily Arab Al-Yawm columnist Fahd Khitan argued in a March 10 editorial that the problem was not the IAF's engagement with the Americans, but its discourse that is marked by complete hostility, contradicting the truth of their position. Khitan asserted the Islamists should "fine-tune" their rhetoric and announce that their differences with U.S. policy do not amount to "estrangement." Khitan also observed that opposition parties look abroad for support when harassed inside their own country and that real debate about political reform within Jordan would take away the need to discuss the matter outside the country.

¶4. (C) The Ministry of Interior contacted the Embassy Protocol Office when news broke of Gharaibeh's trip to confirm that he was granted a visa and to enquire whether he had been invited by the USG. (Note: Gharaibeh had already traveled to Washington, and Post did not respond to the inquiry. End Note.) Royal Court Chief Nasser Al-Lozi told the Ambassador on March 11 that the GOJ is not concerned about the coverage of Gharaibeh's comments since the focus in the press up until that point had been on the perceived hypocrisy of the IAF for seeking to engage the U.S.

¶5. (SBU) By way of background, Post does not meet with IAF officials, who hold six seats in Parliament. The IAF Secretary General sent POTUS a congratulatory message via the

U.S. Embassy to the President on January 21, urging him to be
"open to suggestions and willing to debate the political
forces that represent the Islamic world." (reftel)

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